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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0360
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0282
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0336
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 1883
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0664
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0777
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000706

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SUBJECT: ABDALLAHI UNIMPRESSED WITH FRENCH SPECIAL ENVOY

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: President Abdallahi's advisors claim the special French delegation headed by Elysee Africa Director Romain Serman offered no concrete proposals but suggested the need for a concession by President Abdallahi. Abdallahi held firm to his position of no negotiations while the military remains in power -- at least until international sanctions have reached their peak effectiveness. The Abdallahi camp took exception to French overtures to Leader of the Opposition Ahmed Ould Daddah. The regime blocked President Abdallahi's efforts to present his own national day message on November 28. The FNDD is worried about the prison conditions for Prime Minister Waghef who is being threatened by prison inmates. End Summary

¶2. (C) Charge met November 30 with Presidential Chief of Staff Mohamed Kaber Ould Hammoudi and FNDD Co-Leader in charge of Foreign Affairs Mohamed Ould Maouloud to discuss the visit over the previous weekend of a bilateral French delegation headed by Elysee Africa Director Romain Serman. Despite press reports that the delegation was presenting a "French Plan" for a solution to the political crisis, Ould Hammoudi said Romain never got into details of any proposal. Instead, Romain said he was looking for the President's appreciation of the situation. Ould Hammoudi noted, however, that Serman's questions "suggested he wanted to see if the President was willing to make a concession." Abdallahi told the French that, while he was prepared to engage in a full political debate once back in office, he was not prepared to negotiate with the military -- "Whether 5% or 50%, any concession to the military legitimized this and future coups." Abdallahi said it was too early to discount the effectiveness of sanctions since, aside from those from the U.S., none had yet been imposed. He suggested that the potential pressure of international sanctions had not yet been reached.

¶3. (C) Ould Hammoudi said the President found weakness and vacillation in the French position. Abdallahi told Serman he accepted the French statement of August 7 (Comment - That (a) condemned the coup, (b) called for Abdallahi's immediate release, and (c) stated "We recall that President Abdallahi was elected in March 2007 following free and transparent elections. He is, therefore, the legitimate President of Mauritania."). Abdallahi asked Serman whether the French position had changed to which the Elysee representative said "no."

14. (C) Charge cautioned Ould Hammoudi and Ould Maouloud not to kill the messenger noting that the French remain Abdallahi's strongest advocates within the European Union against other Europeans who would seek a more "pragmatic" approach to the coup. If they saw some vacillation in Serman's message, it reflected the realities of the conflicting voices among the Europeans and within the French bureaucracy. Charge highlighted the importance of having something concrete to present with the visit of the AU/EU/UN/Arab League/OIC/Francophonie delegation slated for early December. While not offering concessions, Abdallahi's allies (specifically the French and AU) would need something to show that the President has more than just principle in his plan to get back into office. Charge suggested that a tentative timeline showing when he saw international pressure reaching its peak and what specific steps he would be willing to take to resolve political problems if/when he returned to power.

15. (C) The Abdallahi advisors noted their dissatisfaction with the fact that Serman had visited Opposition Leader Ould Daddah in addition to Abdallahi and Aziz. They discounted Charge's suggestions that as the officially designated "Leader of the Opposition" Serman would have seen a need to meet Ould Daddah. "Once he accepted the coup as a 'rectification,' he lost his role as opposition. He says he is against the military but only in the privacy of his living room -- there is nothing in his actions to show his opposition." Ould Maouloud, who had just come from a press conference, was also distressed that western diplomats had attended the November 28 Mauritanian National Day ceremony at

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the Presidency. Charge noted that the diplomats, including the U.S. Acting DCM, had gone as a gesture of respect for the Mauritanian people but had not participated in the after-ceremony reception so as not to honor General Aziz. Ould Maouloud noted the regime had effectively used the coverage of Aziz shaking hands with diplomats (Comment -- perhaps aware of diplomats' plans to leave immediately after the flag ceremony, Presidential protocol changed the order of the ceremony to have Aziz shake hands first. Some local press noted the absence of the U.S. -- not recognizing A/DCM as the American representative).

16. (C) Ould Hammoudi and Ould Maouloud noted that the President had planned to film a national day message in Lemden on the 28th. Security forces, however, forced the President's staff to dismantle reception tents put up for the occasion, kept local residents indoors so they could not participate in any national day celebration, and temporarily confiscated cameras from press in Lemden to ensure that no video of the message had been captured. The advisors noted the obvious contradiction to the regime's public statements that the President could meet anyone he wished.

17. (C) Ould Maouloud asked whether the U.S. could do anything to improve the conditions of confinement for Prime Minister Waghef. Ould Maouloud said Waghef is being held in the general prison population and is being daily threatened and harassed by the prisoners. He provided Charge with a copy of a confidential memorandum from the Regime's Minister of Justice Ahmedou Tidjane Bal to the Attorney General offering "suggestions" concerning the prosecution of the "political adversaries" of the "current Mauritanian Government" concerning the dissolution of Air Mauritanie. The memo suggests that the Attorney General build the case but use the airline's unions and investors to file a complaint so the regime could plead it is only following civil procedure.

HANKINS